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SUBJECT: MALI CREATES UNIT FOR COUNTERING TERRORIST FINANCING AND MONEY LAUNDERING

REF: BAMAKO 00695

¶1. On September 25 the Embassy met with former Minister of Housing Modibo Sylla and Customs Inspector Seydou Diawara to discuss Mali's newly created financial information unit (CNTIF). The CNTIF was created in May 2008 to comply with requirements of the West African Monetary Union (UEMOA) and strengthen Mali's ability to block terrorist financing and money laundering. The CNTIF falls under the Ministry of Finance and is composed of six members including one representative from customs and immigration, two members of the national police, one gendarme, a judge responsible for financial crimes, and a representative from the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO).

¶2. Former Minister Sylla is the CNTIF's president. Diawara is the CNTIF's customs representative and also the Ministry of Finance's representative to Mali's newly created Inter-ministerial Commission Against Terrorism (reftel), to which the CNTIF reports. The Commission's first meeting was supposedly set for August but Diawara indicated that the first meeting would not actually occur until October. An official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs subsequently confirmed that the Commission's first meeting is now set for the first week of October.

¶3. Sylla said the CNTIF would work closely with local banks and that financial institutions and travel agencies in Mali were required to report any suspicious transactions to the CNTIF. He also said the CNTIF hoped to make inroads into the informal sector of financial transfers but noted that the Malian government currently has very little information to go on. For this reason, the CNTIF intends to conduct a number of studies in order to formulate concrete recommendations regarding ways to block the financing of terrorism and money laundering. Sylla also asked whether the U.S. could provide any training for CNTIF personnel. Diawara reported that his colleagues in Senegal had participated in a U.S. Department of Treasury sponsored training on money laundering and asked if similar opportunities were available for Mali.

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